

Union Address, President Bush stood in this very Chamber and told the Nation that the government would take unprecedented measures to protect our people and defend our homeland. As I stand here, almost 5 years after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the President has delivered a budget that will not keep that promise.

The President's proposed budget once again provides inadequate appropriations for Homeland Security. President Bush proposes slashing grants to our first responders. This will include massive cuts to both our firefighter grants and our State homeland security grants. It includes cuts to law enforcement and cuts to the Justice Department, and all of this while trying to fund tax cuts for the wealthiest among us.

Madam Speaker, this Democratic Congress remains focused on protecting this Nation from the real threat of global terrorism. Democrats are fighting for America's future. We will secure not only our homeland but our families, our jobs and our children's future.

HONDURAS MISSION

(Mr. GINGREY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GINGREY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recall the memory of three selfless and courageous Georgians, who tragically were killed in an accident last month while performing missionary work in rural Honduras.

Perry Goad and Ric Mason of Cartersville and Martha Fuller of Newnan were doing God's work on a church mission in the tiny village of Mal Pais. Together with a group of volunteers from several Georgia churches, they were working to set up running water, connect electricity, pave roads and improve life for the families living in Agalta Valley. It was during this effort that the group's truck rolled over on an undeveloped stretch of road, killing Perry, Ric and Martha.

Madam Speaker, these are three outstanding citizens who eagerly dedicated their time, their effort, their love and spirit to helping those in need. They were not content to simply sit in church and learn about the problems facing our world. They made an effort to go out and to fix these problems. And indeed, our community has truly lost three guiding lights.

Madam Speaker, I ask you to join me in remembering the righteous lives of Perry Goad, Ric Mason and Martha Fuller and in offering prayers of healing to the other volunteers who were injured in the accident.

FALSE LINK BETWEEN AL QAEDA-IRAQ

(Mr. PASCRELL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PASCRELL. It is not surprising to learn that during the Scooter Libby trial, Vice President CHENEY's former communications aide, Catherine Martin, said that delivering a message on Meet the Press was a tactic we often use. By the way, within the last 10 minutes, Mr. Libby has been found guilty on four of five counts.

The truth shall lead America. The truth is that the 9/11 Commission found no credible evidence of a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda and the attacks upon the United States. The epicenter of our war against terror is not Iraq but on the border of Pakistan and on the border of Afghanistan.

The American people deserve the truth instead of deceptive tactics. And if this administration won't give the people the truth about this war, then this Congress will.

He stated, Mr. CHENEY, five separate occasions that Saddam Hussein was joined at the hip with bin Laden. He told the American people five times a lie and repeated it year after year on the same TV station. The epicenter of our war on terror is on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members must refrain from engaging in personalities toward the Vice President.

WE MUST TAKE CARE OF OUR VETERANS

(Mr. WALBERG asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WALBERG. Madam Speaker, all of us in this Chamber agree, our recovering veterans deserve hospitals that are clean, secure and sanitary when they return home from the battlefield defending our great Nation in the name of liberty.

The recent findings at Walter Reed Army Medical Center are a grave breach of trust to those who shed blood on the battlefield fighting for our freedoms. This Congress must work with the administration to implement a comprehensive evaluation of conditions at Walter Reed and hold those in charge accountable for these deplorable conditions.

The bipartisan commission created by the President to determine whether similar problems exist at other military and VA hospitals is also a necessary and appropriate course of action. Going forward, we must ensure world-class standards and patient-centered efficiency for our veterans. Better oversight is clearly necessary to ensure military facilities exemplify our soldiers' honor and courage.

As hearings on the conditions at Walter Reed are held this week, this Congress must reaffirm its commitment to our wounded soldiers and veterans to ensure they are provided first class medical care.

WALTER REED SCANDAL

(Mr. COURTNEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, the long-festering situation at Walter Reed's Building 18 is nothing short of a national scandal. I am pleased that the new 110th Congress is taking critical steps this week to investigate problems at the facility, and hold accountable leaders that allowed these conditions to deteriorate to this disgraceful state.

Last week, I met with veterans from my district to express deep concern about the lack of adequate transportation for veterans, the increasing length of time it takes for veterans to receive benefits or access health care and the stagnant funding of the VA system over the last 6 years. And they describe a system unable to cope with increasing patients at a time of war.

The challenges faced by these Connecticut veterans are emblematic of a military and VA health system swamped by the influx of wounded from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and shortfalls of funding to adequately care for them caused by the misplaced priorities of the last Congress.

In the first days of this new Congress, we took an important step to address this problem by providing an additional \$3.6 billion for veterans health care, yet as my constituents related, there remain critical issues that need to be addressed as we move forward. The men and women who serve this country deserve nothing less than a health care system worthy of their service and sacrifice.

□ 1215

CALLING FOR RESOURCES, ATTENTION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FROM GOVERNMENT

(Mr. SARBANES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SARBANES. Madam Speaker, you cannot run America on the cheap.

In the wake of Katrina, we learned that years of requests for investment in infrastructure and basic human needs had been ignored. After sending our troops into Iraq, we learned that they lacked basic protective equipment because this administration was looking to save pennies even as it was wasting billions of dollars on private contracts run amok.

Now the scandal at Walter Reed Hospital is revealing that behind the curtain even our neediest veterans are not being spared the double whammy of inadequate resources and lax accountability.

All Americans should be outraged at this and demand accountability. But we should also be outraged at the cynical agenda this administration has brought to all government functions. Resources are cut, making it impossible for the affected workforce to deliver high-quality services. At the same

time, critical functions are contracted out to the private sector without adequate oversight. Then the administration turns around and says, see, government doesn't work.

Madam Speaker, it's time we reversed course and put adequate resources, attention, and accountability towards the needs of all our citizens but most especially our veterans.

PENTAGON SHOULD HAVE TAKEN ACTION EARLIER THAN THE RELEASE OF THE POST INVESTIGATION

(Mr. SPACE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SPACE. Madam Speaker, both high-ranking Pentagon officials and the White House have said that they were shocked to learn of the shoddy treatment wounded soldiers were receiving at Walter Reed. They say the first time they heard about this treatment was from The Washington Post investigation last month.

Madam Speaker, there is simply no way that the Bush administration did not know that this was a problem before the Post report. Several GAO reports have been conducted at the urging of Congress, and the findings of those reports back up exactly what we are now seeing at Walter Reed.

The Washington Post was also not the first media outlet to highlight this problem. Salon magazine reported on the mistreatment of soldiers at Walter Reed 2 years ago.

And yet the Bush administration continues to claim that it knew nothing about this until the Washington Post investigation last month. The administration is either completely out of touch or it simply does not believe taking care of our wounded military personnel is a top priority. Either way, it should be a top concern for this Congress and the American people.

BUSH ADMINISTRATION SHOULD NOT BE NICKEL-AND-DIMING AMERICA'S INJURED SOLDIERS

(Mr. SIREs asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SIREs. Madam Speaker, The Washington Post headlines said it best: "Rotten Homecoming—This is no way to treat a veteran."

A 4-month Washington Post investigation found frustrating delays some of our returning soldiers are facing in receiving the compensation they are owed for the service to this Nation. One soldier was sent to Walter Reed after being smashed in the head by a steel cargo door of an 18-wheeler near the Iraqi border. Now the Pentagon is saying that the soldier's mental impairment comes from his being slow in high school, not from the dramatic head injury he suffered in combat.

Madam Speaker, this Congress has already begun investigating the out-

rageous problems our soldiers are facing at Walter Reed. President Bush cannot send them off to battle without properly caring for them when they return home.

CONGRESS MUST STOP FUNDING THE WAR

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Madam Speaker, it appears that Congress, in the name of supporting the troops, will soon give President Bush the money he needs to continue the war in Iraq even though we don't take care of the troops when they come home.

If Congress funds the war, what will happen next? More troop casualties; more innocent civilians die; more destruction to Iraq; more destruction to our budget here at home; cuts in health care and education and job creation and housing and, yes, in veterans care.

Unless Congress cuts off funds and brings our troops home, we will be in Iraq for years to come. And for what?

I have introduced H.R. 1234, a bill to bring our troops home and stabilize Iraq.

Congress must take the first step and stop funding the war. Support the troops. Bring them home. Support H.R. 1234.

BUSH ADMINISTRATION NOT PROPERLY PLANNING TO CARE FOR WOUNDED MILITARY PERSONNEL

(Mr. ARCURI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. ARCURI. Madam Speaker, the treatment some of our wounded military personnel are receiving at Walter Reed Army Hospital and other facilities around the Nation is outrageous and should be fixed immediately.

The conditions and the neglect that many of these wounded soldiers are facing is just another example of this administration's failure to plan for the war in Iraq. It was bad enough that the administration went into this war without properly planning for the aftermath of the fall of Baghdad. It is inexcusable that the same administration does not have an acceptable plan to care for wounded soldiers who return from combat in Iraq.

We have all heard the stories about soldiers being moved into Building 18 with mold, mice, and cockroaches because Walter Reed had simply run out of space.

Time after time this administration has cut the Veterans Administration budget during a time of war. And now the President wants to send an additional 21,000 troops into Iraq. How can we think of sending more troops into Iraq when we don't have enough space here in our military hospitals to provide the wounded with the care they rightfully deserve?

We promise our veterans the quality care they need and deserve when they sign up to serve our country. It is time we make good on that promise.

WALTER REED HOSPITAL

(Ms. NORTON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, at yesterday's hearing on Walter Reed, I asked the brass whether putting Walter Reed on the BRAC closure list had affected the hospital's staffing and stability. All responded that it had. Army Vice Chief of Staff Cody said, "We're trying to get the best people. Who would want to sign up to work at a hospital that might be closing?"

You don't close your premium military hospital in the middle of a shooting war and the war on terrorism. I can't imagine that Congress would spend \$3 billion on bricks and mortar that could go to wounded soldiers and to veterans. Yet as long as BRAC mandates closure, vital staff who value their careers get the closure signal.

This week I intend to file a bill to keep Walter Reed open. Too much harm has been done already. Let's not compound Walter Reed's problems by keeping a costly closure threat on the books.

SCHIP

(Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak about the immediate crisis in Georgia's PeachCare program.

Georgia's SCHIP program is expected to have \$131 million in shortfall this fiscal year. This shortfall has forced the Georgia Department of Community Health to announce that by March 11, in only 5 days, it will no longer accept new enrollees. This means that by next week nearly 300,000 children in Georgia will remain uninsured and unable to participate in this hugely successful program.

The leadership in the Georgia General Assembly seems to think that eliminating some children from the program will help resolve the PeachCare crisis. The Governor has so far not stated publicly that he will use available State money to sustain PeachCare during this shortfall crisis. And Congress, for its part, has been unable to act quickly enough to appropriate the funds that Georgia and the other 13 shortfall States need.

The Georgia General Assembly, the Governor, and the Congress must act immediately to save the PeachCare program. Georgia must continue to provide health care to children who are currently enrolled in the PeachCare program and to all of those children who are eligible for the program.

Long live the Dixie Chicks.